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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

REPORT NO.

# INFORMATION REPORT

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COUNTRY Bulgaria

DATE DISTR. 10 March 1949

SUBJECT Reasons for Confessions to Charges of  
Espionage by Protestant Ministers Presently  
on Trial

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SUPPLEMENT TO  
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1. "The Derjavna Sigurnost, the Bulgarian Security Service Service, secures confessions to treason by using a combination of psychological pressure, logical persuasion, mental exhaustion and fear of physical torture. I have never known of any case in which a 'miracle drug' was used to induce confession.
2. "Perhaps I can best explain these influences through describing to some extent my own situation. I am a graduate of Robert College in Istanbul which brands me as a sympathizer with the West and as an enemy of Communism. Ever since the Communists came to power in Bulgaria on September 9, 1944, I have been under surveillance by the Derjavna Sigurnost and the various intelligence services of the Communist Party. Like eighty percent of the people in Bulgaria I am anti-Communist. Like all the rest of the opposition I wish that I could do something to liberate my country from Soviet control, and I would actually to whatever I could to assist in this overthrow of the Communists if only I felt that the Western powers, principally the United States of America, had some practical program for the liberation of Eastern Europe with which they would follow through so that our sacrifices for freedom would not be futile and merely end in the bloody annihilation of those of us who fight for freedom. There was a time, two or three years ago, when many of us felt that such a struggle would be worthwhile and it was then that the pastors committed the 'crimes' with which they are now charged.
3. "Under German controls during the recent war, controls which were actually extremely loose as we look back at them, some of us were exiled from Sofia

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but almost none of us, except for the Communists, were tortured for our political beliefs. We continued to say what we believed and, provided that we committed no overt acts, we remained reasonably secure in our homes. Then came the Red Army. At first we hoped that they brought liberation. American and British officers joined the Soviets in establishing an Allied Control Commission, and we thought that it was safe for us to speak freely to the American and British representatives. Some of us, like the Protestant pastors now charged with treason, publicly praised America and welcomed the charity which the Churches of Bulgaria received from the World Council of Churches in New York City. During 1944, 1945 and 1946 certain representatives of American churches visited Bulgaria. Men like Cyril Black, Mark Ethridge, R.H. Markham and others came. They asked for information concerning all conditions and we openly supplied them with what they wanted. That was when we believed that the United States meant what was said in the Peace Treaty, that the freedoms were to be guaranteed to us. Then came our disillusionment: One by one the Bulgarian friends of the West were arrested, tortured, imprisoned or placed in labor camps. On 28 October 1948 a "States Secrets Law" became operative which almost makes it a crime to talk to a foreigner about anything. Under the provisions of that retroactive law, all the Protestant pastors, who apparently had been corresponding with American churchmen and explaining the plight of their churches, became guilty of espionage. As Christians the churchmen can hardly deny their contacts with representatives of the West or their correspondence with the World Council of Churches, and that automatically makes them guilty. What else can they do but confess and throw themselves on the 'mercy' of the 'court'?

4. "Unfortunately, the churchmen apparently are also guilty of selling on the 'black' market dollar contributions received from America. Under Bulgarian law all foreign currencies must be delivered to the Bulgarian National Bank which pays 285 leva for each dollar but permits the owner to have not more than 40,000 leva per month. If his salary or other income has already provided 40,000 leva (worth approximately \$40.00 in purchasing power), the proceeds of the dollars must remain in a blocked account in the bank. If approval is secured to use some of the funds they usually may be drawn by 'check' only, a document which in Bulgaria is actually not negotiable and is not wanted by Bulgarians for it invariably can only be redeposited in the same bank in a fund which is controlled or blocked. Bulgarians who return from America with dollars receive 450 leva to the dollar while the 'black market' rate for the dollar fluctuates between 1,000 and 1,500. Wanting to use the dollars in the possession of their churches to the best advantage, the pastors have apparently permitted their sale to private persons at the unofficial rate. Actually, the crime is one committed by the Bulgarian Government which does little more than confiscate the dollar gifts when it pays but 285 leva for them and then blocks the leva account.\*
5. "Fear psychology plays an extremely important part in bringing about confessions in Bulgaria. When the Communists came to power they arrested thousands and, without legal proceedings of any kind, executed them. Throughout the past four years they have constantly been purging their enemies through exile, arrest, and execution. The friends of the United States and of Great Britain are automatically their enemies. No person who had friends or relatives in the West or who attended the American College at Simeonovo or Robert College at Istanbul is safe. The Protestant pastors definitely come within this group, having been in correspondence with the World Council of Churches as well as various denominational leaders in the United States.
6. "Each day at four a.m. squads of agents from the Derjavna Sigurnost go about town arresting 'suspects' and searching homes. This is entirely without any 'due process of law' as it is known in America. The searches last for hours; every seam, every page, every room is searched for evidence that the

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that the person has been in contact with the West. Once the agents are ready, the victim, who almost invariably does not know what charges may be made against him, is marched to any one of several secret prisons. Usually he is placed in a cold, damp cell in the basement, without furniture or accommodations of any kind. Here he may remain for months without his family knowing where he is and whether he is alive or dead. There is no writ of habeas corpus; there is no legal process by which the man can be freed. His situation is hopeless, and usually only a ready confession can save him from torture.

7. "Usually before being interrogated the prisoner is left in his cell for days during which time he becomes depressed through the growing fear of what awaits him. During this time he can see, hear, and smell the treatment given other prisoners who have not confessed readily enough. The prisoner hears stories of horrors told by the nearly insane victims themselves. They have been beaten with rubber hoses, strung up for hours by the thumbs, doused with ice water in freezing weather, burned with matches, kept under bright lights for many hours, or confined alone in unheated darkened cells for weeks at a time. At least one case is known to me in which a woman political prisoner was beaten and raped eight times in one night. Perhaps the simplest 'treatment' is the one in which the victim is required to stand for days facing a blank wall. After a day of this test, men's feet have been known to swell to the point that their shoes broke open. And confinement continues for months. Most of the pastors have been under arrest for three months or more before being scheduled for 'trial'. There have been a number of unexplained deaths. Those who have confessed are permitted to receive food from home once each week, as well as a change of linen. Those who are 'uncooperative' must rot in their own filth and soon are nauseated by their own stench for lavatory facilities are almost non-existent.
8. "Then there are the chain interrogations, periods of cross examination and accusation which go on for many, many weary hours while the interrogators relieve each other; but the victim has no relief and becomes so mentally exhausted that he confesses to anything just to terminate the hell in which he finds himself. Under the new legal system now in effect in Bulgaria, even if one secures an attorney he cannot expect his rights to be defended. The lawyers have been severely purged and only Communists or persons believed to sympathize with them may practice law. There is no right of private interview with one's client. Almost invariably the attorney advises his client to plead guilty, particularly where there is any indication of 'espionage'. No attorney today could afford to defend honestly a person facing such a charge.
9. "But why do the defendants go to such lengths to accuse themselves? Almost all persons who have been 'in' remark on one thing: they lost all sense of self respect. Their one desire was to end it all, by suicide or by confession. And having chosen confession the next logical step was self-accusation in an attempt to lighten the sentence. Have the pastors been told that their entire church will be annihilated if they do not confess? Are they fearful for the welfare of their families? Do they feel that the West has betrayed them and that we never will come to their rescue? What must not be overlooked in these cases is that the pastors have been used for publicity purposes, that the Derjavna Sigurnost had to make them confess completely to treason for the effect which it would have on the intimidated Bulgarian public. It would have been much easier to place them in one of the many slave labor camps, without trial or any process of law, as has been done with so many thousands of the opposition in Bulgaria. For political reasons these men had to be made to confess. One clue to their actions may possibly be found in the case of a man who did not confess: (Nikola Petkov.) And they say of him that his body was such a shapeless mass

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by the time they were ready to hang him that the hangmen could hardly find the neck around which to put the rope, and the butchered bleeding body had to be quickly buried in the night unseen by priest or friend. There may be some truth in the saying: 'Wise men confess!'

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**Comment:** One exception to this case is provided by a clause contained in the contract of the American Motion Picture Exporters Association with the Bulgarian Government, which clause permits that Association to turn over to certain Bulgarian churches leva earned by its pictures in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian Government pays leva for the pictures but does not permit these leva to be redeemed with dollars. As permitted by the contract, the World Council of Churches has been paying dollars to AMPEA in New York City and AMPEA, through Jean Birkhahn, its representative in Sofia, has been paying leva to one of the Protestant churches there. Now Birkhahn is accused of being a "paymaster" while the pastors allegedly were his "spy ring". It can be stated with absolute certainty that Birkhahn, a Latvian Jew, received no "espionage information" from the pastors.

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